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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study designed to analyze the evolution of neighborhood movements in Rio de Janeiro City (Brazil) focuses on actions related to the struggle for public schools. The effort seeks to determine the degree of political autonomy of the neighborhood associations and the nature of the educational demands and their relationship with the ideology that underlay the movements. Using an oral history approach, interviewees were selected among the presidents and former presidents of the existing slum and neighborhood associations. Analysis of the first neighborhood movements for public education illustrates a strategy modeled on a poorly politicized population using a traditional patronage format (votes for school buildings). A second phase beginning in 1983 involves a more autonomous structure and a new belief that the state had a duty to provide and maintain educational services. Assessment of results of the organizations' fights shows effects that were insignificant compared to the efforts involved. However, the process helps citizens to learn their duties as well as civil rights. The study concludes that these social movements emerged from the serious deprivation generated by great economic deprivation. However, their development is possible only with the declining strength of the military regime. Statistical data are presented in one table. Eight references are included. (JB)

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# NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MOVEMENTS AND THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL IN RIO DE JANEIRO STATE

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# NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MOVEMENTS AND THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL IN RIO DE JANEIRO CITY

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Social movements are more frequent in highly mobilized urban societies, as a spontaneous popular iniciative, free from the influence or control of the power elite or the political parties (Castells, 1983).

When the State fails to fulfill the basic needs of the population, the civil society reacts, demanding more attention from authorities and better life conditions.

Another assumption underlying the emergence and success of the movements is an existing relative degree of freedom to allow for mass manifestation and to maintain open discussion with the State.

From 1964 to 1983, Brazil was under military regime, and democratic practices were banished from the country. For about 20 years, the Brazilian population was maintained apart from political participation. Any individual or group manifestation was considered "subversion" of the order and was repressed by police force, especially if the opposition came from schools or factories. There was not space to learn political practices and to create new popular leadership, prepared to fight for social rights.

However, in the 70's, little by little the poor communities in large cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro started organizing some slum and neighborhood associations aiming at fighting for those basic needs the State was neglecting to provide, such as housing, health care, transportation, basic sanitation, and education.

These first movements were studied by researchers (Gohn, 1982; Cardoso, 1985; Jacobi, 1987), who questioned the genuine character of the associations as compared with European and Latin American movements. In which measure did the slum and neighborhood associations maintain their autonomy? Would the relationship established with State authorities have the traditional paternalistic pattern of the under-developed countries?

In 1983, Brazil recovered the democratic practices and citizens were allowed to vote for State Governor. As a result, a socialist political party ruled in Rio de Janeiro State from 1983 to 1987. There is lack of follow-up studies to characterize the evolution of neighborhood movements in Rio, in this period, especially an analysis of their behavior related to education.

This paper focuses on an exploratory study designed to analyze the evolution of neighborhood movements in Rio de Janeiro City, particularly those actions related with the struggle for public schools. The study was developed to answer the following questions:

1. What has been the degree of political autonomy of the neighborhood associations, considering:

   (a) the tradicional patronage pattern, prevalent in the relationship between the political class communities, in Brazil; and

   (b) the repression from police forces against civil movements;

2. What is the nature of the educational demands and its relationship with the ideology that underlay the movements?

## Procedure

The exploratory study adopted an approach of oral history, since the existing documents on the movement under analysis do not provide sufficient data. The interviewees were selected among the Presidents and former Presidents of the existing slum and neighborhood associations and Federations, in Rio de Janeiro City, in 1989. In addition, the Annals of the Association Congress were analyzed on the light of the literature reviewed.

## Socio-Economic and Political Context

When, in 1964, a military group overthrew the President in charge, only 45% of the Brazilian population were located in urban areas. In the following decades the urban population increased to 56% in 1970 and 67% in 1980. (Table 1)

TABLE 1

Distribution of the Brazilian Population by Zone

| Year | RURAL N | % | URBAN N | % | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1960 | 38.987.526 | 54,95 | 32.004.817 | 45,09 | 70.992.343 |
| 1970 | 41.603.810 | 44,02 | 52.904.744 | 55,98 | 94.508.554 |
| 1980 | 38.566.297 | 32,41 | 80.436.409 | 67.59 | 119.002.706 |

SOURCE: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1989.

The economic model adopted by the dictatorial regime, and supported by multinational capital, stresses the industrial development, by introducing modern technology and know-how, in order to guarantee quality and large production destined for export and for the high bourgeoisie and technocrat consumption - the ones who earn high salaries, essencial to maintain the economic model (Furtado, 1972).

The salaries of the working class were "freezed", so that large profits were shared by the national bourgeoisie and the multinational capital.

The agriculture was neglected, resulting in decline of the crops, high rate of rural unemployment, and the consequent rural exodus to large cities, which are supposed to offer better life conditions. (Table 1)

The urbanization in process was not able to cope with the accelerated increase in population in an organized way. Housing, sanitization, transportation and health care became insufficient to satisfy the needs of the population as a whole.

It was also necessary to increase the number of schools, to multiply the number of teachers, and to reform curriculum and instruction in order to answer the demands of the new working classes.

However, the budget destined to social problems and specially to the educational reform was far from sufficient to attend the basic needs.

Only vocational and technical education received some attention, as it was the source of skilled workers for the industries. Secondary technical education was the only school level taken into account by the State budget.

The other educational levels, from pre-school to colleges and universities, were neglected by the government, and were left for the private capital.

Before this serious picture of the socio-economic background, any popular reaction could be expected.

## The Slum and Neighborhood Associations

In the first years of dictatorial regime, the political repression did not foster the emergence of popular movements. After 1977, the weakness of the Brazilian economic model brought about a crisis which unbalanced the prestige of the military power. As a consequence of the concentration of income in the high social class, the poor class increased in number, as well as in the degree of deprivation.

The standard of life became so low in the slums of Rio de Janeiro that popular movements emerged from the poorest places, claiming for better social services for their communities.

The State could not disregard the demands, however, its responses were insignificant before the huge task of overcoming the social crisis.

Little by little the number of slum associations increased and spread out to middle class neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro city. In 1983, 77 associations participated in the first Neighborhood Association Congress. Two years later, the Second Congress gathered 316 Associations, and in 1987, 700 Associations were present in the Third Congress.

## Results and Discussion

It became clear that the popular movement of Neighborhood Associations in Rio de Janeiro city emerged as a result of the

crucial situation to which the poor class was submitted. In addition, by the late 70's, the low prestige of the military ruling power hindered a negative reaction against the movement.

The analysis of the first neighborhood movements for public education indicated that the strategy they adopted is also explained by their degree of autonomy from the political forces. The initial strategy consisted of a give and take exchange, in which the community guaranteed a given number of votes for the next elections, in order to obtain a new school building.

This clientelistic practice may be explained in two ways: first of all, 20 years of political repression resulted in a poorly politicized population; second, as it was already explained, the patronage model has strong roots in Brazil and in Latin America as a whole.

It is important to register that the Presidents of the Associations prefer to omit this fact and affirm their independence and autonomy. However, during the interviews, the paternalistic relationship became evident.

Starting from 1983, a second fase marked the evolution of the Neighborhood Associations,which attained a more mature stage, assuming their autonomy in front of the State, and the politicians. From then on, the communities became aware that social services do not have to be "paid" with votes. To the contrary, it is a duty of the State to provide and maintain these services.

We perceived that a very important advancement has taken place in the political attitude of the Associations. With time they developed critical thinking and reached a higher level of political culture.

The assessment of results of the Associations' fights for public education shows that the effects are insignificant as compared with the efforts. However, the exercise of democratic

practices helped citizens to learn about their duties as well as their civil rights.

## The Nature of Claims

At first, the Neighborhood Associations' educational concern relied on the construction of new schools or the improvement of old school buildings. Another important claim was related with the provision of teachers for the new schools.

We noticed that the main concern is still a fight for schooling only, for increasing the number of children enrolled, the amount of teachers, still insufficient, the equipment, and the number of school buildings. However, the Neighborhood Associations have not yet reached the stage of fighting for an educational project envolving school quality,well trained teachers, more adequate curricula and instruction, and more equality of educational opportunities.

The President of one of the Neighborhood Associations is aware that there is a long way to go until the community reaches a higher stage of demands:

> "We are growing up", he saus, "but there are many children out of school and we still have to fight for more schools. We are waiting for the right time to fight for a democratic school and for better quality of education."

In 1983, the first direct election for State Governor put on rule a Socialist Party in Rio de Janeiro. The new administration gave priority to the educational needs of the population. The

communities' leaderships were called to discuss the school problems, the establisment of Parent & Teacher Association - PTA - in each school, and an emphasis in community participation in the decision making process, including the selection of the school Principal.

## Conclusions

Social movements in Rio de Janeiro city emerged from the serious deprivation generated by a very mean income distribution. However, its development only took place with the decline of the military regime.

The long period of authoritarian political regime interfered with the exercise of democratic practices and contributed to the alienation of the citizens.The Neighborhood Associations, on the opposite, seems to function as a means to prepare citizens for more democratic practices and higher critical thinking.

The total awareness of the net of interactions involving true democratic education is still to be achieved. This is particularly the case with the teacher-student relationship, which evidently has not attained a satisfactory configuration.

However, there is no clarity of the direct correspondence between this relationship and the quality of education, as well as of the latter and the democratization of the school system.

Prominent problems like lack of teachers, insecure building structures, poor electric fittings, and violence in schools divert the movements from more profound issues; therefore, a political educational project , able to guarantee free and good quality public education for all, is still to be an object of consideration and claim.

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